NĀ LEO O KAPA

The Voices of Kapa

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INTRODUCTION

Kapa (Hawaiian barkcloth) was the ubiquitous fabric of historic Hawai‘i, used for clothing, bedding, birth swaddling, funeral shrouds, and many things in between. This textile is crafted from the bast (inner fibers) of the wauke tree (paper mulberry, *Broussonetia papyrifera*). The laborious process involves growing and then harvesting the trees, stripping the bast from the heartwood, removing the outer bark, and retting the bast in both salt water and fresh water for several days. Once the bast is adequately softened, it is beaten on a large, flat kua pōhaku (rock anvil) using a rounded wooden beater (hohoa) to make mo‘omo‘o, which is a precursor to kapa. Several sheets of mo‘omo‘o are laid atop one another on a kua lā‘au (wood anvil) and felted together by beating with an i‘e kuku (grooved wooden beater). Once the resulting material is deemed completed, it is dried, smoothed, and finally decorated with plant dyes and earth pigments.

Waves of European and American merchants in the late 18th and early 19th centuries brought countless items to the islands, including cotton and linen textiles. As these fabrics were adopted, the practice of making kapa rapidly ceased. It is estimated that by the late 19th century few, if any, active kapa practitioners remained. By 1870, esteemed historian Samuel Kamakau wrote: “All are dead who knew how to make coverings and loincloths and skirts and adornments and all that made the wearers look dignified and proud and distinguished” (Na Hana a ka Po‘e Kahiko 1976, pg. 116).

Beginning in the mid-20th century, a number of pioneering Kanaka Maoli practitioners and researchers became interested in reviving this craft. Their work towards achieving this goal involved studying historic kapa housed in such places as the Bishop Museum, visiting neighboring Pacific island communities where barkcloth is still manufactured, poring over historic texts, and countless hours of experimentation. Thanks to their efforts, interest in kapa gradually spread. Today, the number of kapa makers across the pae ‘āina is ever-increasing.

This zine (self-published booklet) is a celebration of several of our cherished kapa makers, with quotes selected from interviews conducted by Avalon Paradea between 2023 - 2026. To learn more about these interviews and kapa in general, please see the resources page at the end.

E ola nā leo o nā kumu kapa!

MAILE ANDRADE

Maile Andrade was born on April 27th, 1952. Around 1981, Maile took a washi paper class hosted by Temari Hawai‘i on O‘ahu. The instructor, a visiting artist from Japan, asked about the “paper making” tradition in Hawai‘i (referring to kapa) and who still practiced it. “And then Temari said, ‘Oh yeah, that's quite interesting. Let's research this.’ And so they were planning to bring a group of people in to do kapa making, which allowed them also to research who were the kapa makers at that time, who was doing what.” Temari put out a call to various hula hālau, looking for practitioners and potential students for a kapa workshop. Maile’s kumu hula, Roselle Bailey, approached Maile, saying she wanted to send her as she was an artist. Over 20 people attended the multi-day workshop, including instructors such as Pua Van Dorpe, Dennis Kana‘e Keawe, and Carla Freitas. This was Maile’s first experience learning kapa, which she has continued to practice ever since.

After completing her BA at UH Hilo, Maile and her ‘ohana moved to O‘ahu so that she could attend graduate school. “I did an MFA, which is a terminal degree. I taught at the Art Department for serial printmaking and fiber arts, and they gave me an opportunity to create a new class called ‘Native Hawaiian Visual Language.’ So then I taught art from a native point of view. At the meantime, Lilikalā, who was director for Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, said, ‘Maile, can you come teach at the center?’ So I developed a class in Hawaiian fiber arts, and that's where I taught kapa, ulana, hana ‘ie‘ie , and ‘upena, net making, because I was interested in those fiber arts. And I think that enhanced even my journey, because when you teach it, then you got to practice.”

Maile has seen herself as a bridge for students to learn these practices. “I believe being a kumu is... a‘o mai and a‘o aku, that it goes both ways. So learning becomes both ways. And that was part of my philosophy, is, you

got to show up in class, because I'm learning from you as much as you're learning from me... My goal was never to be a master or anything. It was just to practice and hold this ‘ike and pass it on, because when you're passing on, you're actually acknowledging the people who spend time with you.”

Kapa connects Maile with the past: “... when I'm beating or when I'm making kapa, or when I'm working in my garden directly with the material, I'm thinking about ... there's someone two hundred, three hundred, four [hundred] years ago that's doing exactly the same thing. You know, and that's the relationship to continue, that ‘ike.”

An important aspect of making kapa for Maile includes asking philosophical questions on how kapa is defined, the intent of its creation, and how she and others approach this work. “... traditional, for me, is a colonized word. You know, all native people who are dealing with language say it's colonized, it's a colonized word because it locks you in a period of time.” Maile further muses on whether a form of self-colonization has occurred within contemporary kapa-making. This stems in part from the limited examples of historic kapa that have been preserved by museums. While these kapa are undoubtedly important and cherished, they cannot be divorced from colonial aesthetic biases. “So when you start looking at the stuff that's the everyday, stuff that people are wearing every day, is that kapa? It's not the flash stuff. ... Are we only looking at the five-star-rated thing, you know what I mean? And so, to me, what are we saying about culture then? Is it only this superficial superstar culture?” This includes wondering whether reproducing museum pieces is artistry or simply copying, and if the latter, what purpose that action may serve. “So I think our people were thinking on a different level. Are we thinking on that level now?”

On her current focus: “I'm only making kapa now for ceremony, and all the other stuff I do with wauke is more sculptural and installational.
...my practice today is actually questioning those more core values, of why we do things and behave, and how our ancestors see the world, and how we see the world today. ... And right now I feel a lot of that stuff is not in isolation. It's really community. So it's building community, building relationships. And when I say relationships, I'm building relationships with people, as well as with material and with practice.”

KAWAI AONA-UEOKA

Kawai Aona-Ueoka was born on May 12th, 1954. She was raised in Nānākuli by her grandma, whom she loved dearly. Kawai had to overcome tremendous difficulties from an early age, as she experienced a rough childhood. “But one thing that I really became passionate about, eventually, was art, because I had this art teacher, Itsuo Tsukano.” A memory she shares was having her art on display at the Ala Moana shopping center: “So we got to Ala Moana. This the first time I saw my work up on display. And then that was... the most awesome thing, for me to see my own work up. And then there was actually people that looked at it, you know, they actually looked at it... And to me, it was an awesome experience, because... knowing that you somehow have value is important, for any child, to discover that they have value.”

Kawai felt deeply moved the first time she watched a hula kahiko performance, and felt the chanting was a kāhea, a call, that reached deep within her. She started dancing hula with Maʻiki Aiu Lake and fell deeply in love with it, as challenging as it was. At times, she felt she was channeling her kūpuna, and was told as much by another practitioner. As she put it: “Just ancient things, I seem to become immersed in, and things happen that I cannot explain.” She learned early on not to mess around with the energies that surround the practice of oli and hula. “In Hawaiian things, in art, we have a task. In Hawaiian things, nā mea kahiko, is a responsibility. Things of old is a responsibility, not a talent, not a gift.”

“Auntie Maʻiki say, "Hula is the art of showing how you see, you hear, you smell, and taste, and feel, because hula is life.” Hula and kapa have both been integral aspects of Kawai’s life journey, and overlap in many ways. “Without hula, I wouldn't have done kapa because it was Auntie Maʻiki. When we wanted to give Auntie Maʻiki a gift, when we ʻuniki as a class, we decided it was kapa. So my hula brothers and sisters went throughout their ʻohana, to their ʻohana, and whoever they knew, to find out how to

get kapa. And they couldn't get kapa because the kapa that they knew of were family heirlooms. Hawaiian kapa was nowhere to be had. So I thought to myself, ‘That's weird. How come we Hawaiian, in Hawai‘i, we want to give a gift of kapa to our Hawaiian teacher, but we cannot get kapa?’”

Kawai’s Uncle Pua worked at Ulu Mau Village as the “canoeman,” and was very supportive of her exploring Hawaiian practices. Friends of her uncle, a haole couple named Bud and Mary Loveland, gave her an i‘e kuku as a wedding present.“And every time I came across it, it told me, ‘I thought you wanna do kapa.’” Finally, she took a class with Happy and Kats Tamanaha, who she met through the Lovelands. She was given her first wauke tree, which she planted at her home in Ka‘a‘awa. “And so, you know, a journey to do Hawaiian things took more than Hawaiians. It took a community. And if you're going to do kapa in ancient times, it took a community, not one person.”

“Nothing in life happens just because. You can call it a coincidence, but to me, it was supposed to happen. Because I supposed to do what I do.”

Kawai became a teacher and started teaching her students about kapa. She was friends with organizers of Hui Mālama I Nā Kūpuna, a group dedicated to repatriating iwi. Kawai was approached and asked to teach others how to make kapa for iwi, and she started teaching communities throughout the islands. The focus was on community members, not researchers or academics. “So my thing about kapa is biased. I should teach Hawaiians before anybody else. ... But that was my premise in doing workshops. I wanted to get Hawaiians first, if anyone should bring kapa making back into today, Hawaiians should bring it back, at least be the driving force. Because, you know, Japanese will learn, the Pakes will learn. And you know, everybody gonna come and they gon' learn, but Hawaiians should have the opportunity first.”

Kawai balances the hardships she has endured with the wisdom she has earned through trials and triumphs alike. She believes others can do the same. “First and foremost, you must learn to get to know yourself, because ignorance is not an excuse. If you are ignorant, then you gotta learn.”

“You just gotta dream 'em and put it out there, and the universe will take care of it. You know, after all, kūpunas are everywhere.”

“You just gotta ho‘omau. That word, you gotta put down, ho‘omau. You gotta persevere. You gotta stick to your guns. You gotta be po‘o pa‘akikī, like me.”

A‘IA‘I BELLO

A‘ia‘i Bello was born on O‘ahu on October 4th, 1956. In the early 1990s, while working as a teacher, she took Hawaiian club students on a trip to Maui to engage in a variety of cultural activities. “So Auntie Val Aiwohi lives at Kahakuloa on Maui and she was one who made for the iwi. ... And one of the things was to pound kapa, because that's what she did. And so she had brought out a piece and all the kids took turns on it. And she kept asking me, ‘Aren't you gonna pound?’ And I said, ‘Oh, let the kids pound,’ you know. And finally, when all the kids pounded, she goes, ‘Okay, finally.’ And I started pounding and all she did was sit there and stare at me. And, you know, I kind of got into it. And I'm going, ‘Oh, I like this.’ And she goes, ‘Good!’”

She went on to take an eight-week kapa class taught by Dalani Tanahy in 2009. In her words, “Thats when kapa took over my life. ... Dalani, I acknowledge her as my teacher and she has been an inspiration in so many ways... she’s been a real big inspiration.”

In time, A‘ia‘i learned enough to take on her own haumāna. On her practice as a kumu: “Yeah, because you put so much mana into it while you're making it. And that's one of the reasons that when I teach - because I'm a chanter - I teach them prayers. We never start pounding, we never harvest, without chanting. When we go to weed the māla, we do like, five or six chants before we even start weeding, you know. And then we will always chant before we leave the māla.”

A‘ia‘i shares an important aspect of her classes: “And one of my requisites in class is that you're not done with my class until you've taught somebody else the process of making kapa. And if you're 20 years old, it doesn't have to be ‘til you're 80 years old, and that's on you, your conscience. And I have people do it right away. ... Other people are mothers, so as long as you pound kapa with your children, you're good to go. Other people were

teachers, and so they would do a little project and do it like that. And other people, I think they're just waiting until they're old, like me (laughs)."

A‘ia‘i shares her connections to other energies: "... I have this relationship with people on the other side of the veil, and I allow myself to be guided. Okay, I had a dream when I started pounding kapa, and it was of me hitting the kapa, boom, boom, boom, on a rock. And I thought, ‘Oh, my goodness, kapa is so sacred, you can't do that to kapa, right?’ And then I think it was at Keauhou when I met Wesley Sen, and he was stripping a piece, and it didn't want to come off, and he started hitting it with the other piece. And I looked at him, and he goes, ‘I just loosening it. This one kind of stubborn, this don't want to come off.’ And I started laughing and crying, and I said, ‘Wes, I got to tell you about my dream.’ And he goes, ‘Ho, you, your kupuna came and told you what to do, and you didn't listen!’ I said, ‘Because I just don't think that throwing it on the ground as hard as you can was being nice to it!’"

A‘ia‘i shares that kapa has "been a journey of learning, you know, just constant learning. And I like the learning. I'm still learning."

"You make connections, not just to other people, but to places that grow what you need, to places where kapa has historically been cared for. You just have a greater sense of understanding and wanting to mālama ‘āina. But, you know, I now have in my circle of acquaintances that many have become very dear friends. I have woodworkers, I have carvers, I have farmers, and even kapa students. And so I want to be that teacher that Dalani was for me, to support them throughout this process. I think, that as a way to take care of our iwi kūpuna, it brings kind of like dignity to us as Hawaiian people. To be able to bury our kūpuna and care for them in a way that we know is culturally correct. So yes, many, many things, personally, it has filled my life, even where I didn't know it needed filling or didn't want it."

"So I believe that kapa, like hula, is life and you know, I'm just very grateful. I'm very grateful that kapa took over my life."

A‘ia‘i passed in the Spring of 2026. Her memory and her legacy will continue to burn bright, carried forward by those she touched in life.

KA‘IULANI DE SILVA

Ka‘iulani was born on November 8th, 1954, in Honolulu. She started making kapa in the mid 1990s. In her words: “I always say that hula brought me to kapa. I had done hula all my life, and when I was in hālau, one of the mothers of another hula dancer was a kapa maker, Moana Eisele. And I think because she saw me making lei, making implements and costumes, she knew I had an interest in crafts, and in the culture, and she invited me to learn kapa making. And I was intrigued because I had done hula and crafts and things throughout my life, but kapa making was really not something that was being done widely at that time, and I thought it was a challenge and interest. So I started with her and studied with her for a few years, we actually did two State Foundation on Culture and the Arts master and apprentice grants to learn kapa making so I could learn kapa making from her. And then after that, she released me to learn and explore on my own. And I embarked on, gosh, what is it now, over thirty years of kapa.”

Kapa has often been referred to, by various scholars, as having gone “extinct.” “I don't say it was extinct, because there were people doing it here and there, but I would say it was dormant. Much of the knowledge was lost during that dormancy, and so part of what we had a commitment to do as kapa makers - and I say ‘we’ because there's sort of a loose network of friends, independent kapa makers - but everyone has a commitment to try to rediscover, renew, to be able to replicate the processes that were used by traditional Hawaiian kapa makers. And knowing that on each island, people did it in different ways. They had somewhat different vocabularies for things. Sometimes the same kind of kapa had different names on each island. And even among families or areas, moku, on the island, it may be done differently. So, much like hula, not all knowledge was in one place. ... Some places you had to use māmaki because they didn't have wauke, or they use certain dyes, because they didn't have other kinds of dyes. They use what was in their neighborhood. And I think that's beautiful.”

Growing up in Mānoa, and in Hawai‘i more broadly, has helped influence Ka‘iulani’s passion in kapa and hula. She recognizes the essential relationship between practitioner and ‘āina. “And I think the relationship with the plants and the environment that we live in has to be reciprocal. People thrive if the environment thrives. If the environment doesn't thrive, we don't thrive… It is that reciprocal relationship, the knowledge that we live in this place, and we thrive because it thrives. But it has a kuleana and responsibility that we need to give back and take care of it. And that care for me started here at my home, my piko, but it grew to encompass the ahupua‘a. … I think, working with plants, to me, whether I'm rappelling down the hillside and whacking back and forth (laughter), it's therapeutic, it breathes. I mean, there are living spirits in plants, there are living spirits in everything we use in kapa making.”

In terms of the resources for kapa, Ka‘iulani says, “It takes a village!” She grows her own wauke, and also helps hula hālau grow and harvest. In some cases, dyes she cannot grow in Mānoa are sourced from friends who live in environments suitable for those plants. “And this is something that was traditional. We follow the practice that the local residents, the local practitioners, understood the seasons.”

Finding deeper connections between fabric and intention are essential to her practice as a kapa maker. “And so that's sort of been the foundation of when I do the design and creating kapa, is, ‘What's the story behind it? What's the message?’ … So I think it is an exchange of creative forces, of inspiration. But I try to, as much as possible, to work creatively and traditionally, and for traditional purposes.”

In terms of perpetuating kapa, Ka‘iulani shares: “I think that the younger that we can impact people, the kids, and teach them and just get them excited about it, the better. Because for us, I talked about aloha ‘āina being a personal experience. I think that's what we have to make sure our kids experience.”

“I think there needs to be a lot more discussion out in the public to really talk about some of the questions that have been brought up by kapa makers. What is traditionally Hawaiian is still debated… my belief is always: learn the traditional, learn the foundation, and go from there.”

ROEN HUFFORD

Roen Hufford was born on July 21st, 1950, in Hoʻolehua, Molokaʻi. She first started making kapa in 1997, under the tutelage of her mother, the late, respected lei and kapa maker Marie McDonald. Marie herself “had an interest [in kapa] that went back to the 1960s.” This interest stemmed out of an earlier interest in plant dyes, which Marie started researching in the 1950s. “Whenever she had access to some plant materials, she would make a batch of dye and she would dye silk, wool, cotton, and if she had some, kapa.” Roen initially got into kapa due to her mother’s desire for her to carry it on. “She insisted I do it. That was the initial spark. She said, ‘You gotta do this.’”

Roen resides in Puʻu Kapu, Waimea, on Hawaiian Home Lands that her mother started leasing in 1978. “And at that point, she didn't have any intention of becoming a farmer, but her husband said that it would be an opportunity for her to have more space to grow the kinds of plants that she needed to do the various things that she did. So she looked at it as an opportunity to start a lei garden, to start a garden that had dye plants and also, to plant the wauke that she carried around for a while after they moved here from Oʻahu.” Roen continues to grow wauke manalima, which Marie brought from Kualoa, and poʻaʻaha, which came from UH Mānoa by way of Maile Andrade. These wauke are quite prolific, and require substantial work to maintain. Fortunately, this has always meant there is excess material for others to use. “And I would share with other kapa makers like Verna Takashima and Kaʻiulani de Silva. They would come up, usually in the summer, and I'd say, ‘Let's harvest,’ and we'd just spend several days just cutting and harvesting. And they would take whatever they harvested back to Oʻahu to do what they needed to do.”

After her mother became less active in teaching kapa, Roen took the helm around 2011. “So I would get requests from different school groups, like HPA [Hawaiʻi Preparatory Academy] during the summer wanted to

have an experience. But that still wasn't enough [to manage the wauke]. ... But they would help, we would get some material. And there's nothing like a 15 year old kid wanting to cut down a tree!" While her wauke patches remain bountiful, Roen has noticed changes due to ongoing drought, requiring her to irrigate the plants regularly.

Roen continues to use the kapa tools once used by her mother. "Her kua was made by my father, William McDonald. And it's koa." Many of her other tools were made by woodworkers such as Kanaʻe Keawe and Solomon Apio, using woods such as ʻuhiʻuhi, koaiʻa, and kauila.

Roen makes kapa for a variety of purposes, from hula adornment to wall art. "It starts with the beating. To beat out a nice piece of kapa. That is the first thing, is to challenge myself to do it nicely." From there, she determines how she will decorate her kapa as appropriate. "And I would say that I'm first a student of art, as opposed to a maker of stories about, or drawing inspiration from, nature or anything like that. I look at this as, 'Is the color balanced? Or do I need to repeat this shape in here? Or do I need a darker line?' That's how I approach it. ... The basic color background is put on with a brush, and once in a while I'll use ʻohe kāpala which I've inherited from my mother." Roen also enjoys stamping with natural plant materials, such as banana stems and sansevieria leaves.

"That's the best part; when kapa makers get together, they like to pick each other's brains." Roen shares that many of the techniques she uses today, she learned alongside other kapa makers. "I'm really thankful for all the other kapa makers, who have kind of evolved at the same time as I did. We were all beating together. This isn't something that we claim ownership of. When I got together with some kapa makers, some barkcloth makers, from another country, another part of the Pacific, and I saw how similar - and yet different - ways we handled the bast, that was pretty exciting."

Roen identifies three major components to being a kapa maker: "The first third is getting through the mechanics of doing all of this. The second part is developing a relationship with the other kapa makers. And the last part is enjoying how people feel about what you do. When I recently was in Honolulu, I made it a point, I was doing this talk in front of a group of people and I pointed out that they're as much a part of this whole process as the kapa makers and the wauke. That the audience, or the consumers, are very much a part of all of this, because they fuel the kapa makers. Because they enjoy our work, and they want to see it happen."

LEI ISHIKAWA

Lei Ishikawa was born on June 6th, 1959. She first became acquainted with kapa at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE) when it was hosted in Hilo. “So after the WIPCE, couple years went by, and I was working at Pūnana Leo o Maui, and I was in the administration part of it. But one of our kapa makers here on Maui, Auntie Valerie Dukelow, came by, and she asked the kumus if we would be interested in making kapa for our iwi kūpuna. And when she asked that question to us, everybody said yes, of course. But that changed my life, because I wanted to do something for our kūpuna. I wanted to do this for our lāhui.”

Her ‘ohana stewards the Paeloko Learning Center, which provides culturally-rooted opportunities for the Maui community. Paeloko serves as a vital space for Lei’s work, for ceremony, and for the transmission of knowledge between visitors and volunteers including healthcare workers, school groups, and college students. This ‘āina is intimately tied to kapa, as shared by Lei: “You know, one story that Paeloko has is that Paeloko was the place where Maui came to gather his resources, yeah? So in the story of Maui capturing the sun, his mother was Hina, and she would pound kapa, she would kuku kapa, and the sun raced across the sky so quickly that her kapa couldn't dry. And so he went to talk to his grandmother, his kupuna, and she told him to come to Paeloko, where we're at right now, to gather his resources, and that's what he did. He came to Paeloko, grabbed the coconut husk, made his cordage to go up to Haleakalā and lasso the sun. So his goal, Maui's goal, was to slow down the sun so his mother, Hina, could dry her kapa. And so for Paeloko, those are things that we always take great consideration in. The kapa, the kaula, you know, and just being here, mālama the ‘āina. [Maui] went and he asked his kupuna, and that's why it's important for us here at Paeloko that we look to our kūpuna for the answers in our stories, in our mele, in our ‘ōlelo noʻeau. ... So doing the cultural practice is one thing, but making those connections is important, it's really important, and having the resources, and that's what Paeloko is.”

Lei cites Moana Eisele as one of her kumu, and she has learned from Lisa Schattenburg-Raymond as well, referring to her as a “master kapa maker and master researcher.”

Lei grows waukenui, poʻaʻaha, and mālolo varieties of wauke at Paeloko, and many dye plants as well. “I love playing with dyes. And it's always a wonderful experience. I totally believe in ma ka hana ka ʻike, in doing, we learn.”

In considering how all the plants and elements of the land interact with each other, Lei says it is “like one big science lab.” She encourages others to “advocate for the space, our place, and advocate for our resources. … we have to advocate for the water” in order to keep ʻike Hawaiʻi alive.

Lei’s kapa focus is not on creating “art pieces” but rather, as she says, “I need to know the intention” of what she is making. Her work is “always connected to a ceremony.”

Lei shares a touching story about her young granddaughter intuitively helping her make kapa while at the beach: “And all of a sudden, she grabs some salt water, and she starts just kind of like, sprinkle on top of the kapa. And I was like, ‘Oh.’ And I kept on pounding it and stuff like that. And she grabbed some more water, sea water, and she started sprinkling it on top, you know? And I was fine, it had sand on it, or whatever, I'm good with that kind of stuff. And she's doing that, and I saw the movement of the kapa, you know, how the wauke was moving. And it was like, it was right. And I felt like, that is really good, you know? And this is early on in my understanding what wauke is and how it moves, and all that kind of stuff. But I saw that, and I was like, ‘This is really good.’ She kept on doing that and talking story, whatever, picking it up and just sprinkling water. Then I come to find out there's a word for that, right? There's a name for it, and I cannot think what it is, but there's a name of a child that does that, that sits with your … [tearing up] sorry, that sits with a kapa maker, she gets the water and she sprinkles it. And there's a name of [that] child. … I think that's my vision, is to be able to experience that. It wasn't something I knew, it wasn't something that was intentional, but it was something that connected her to do that, which is pretty cool!”

SABRA KAUKA

Sabra Kauka was born on April 16th, 1945. She first became aware of kapa through her aunt, Eleanor Williamson, who worked at Bishop Museum. “Auntie Ellie worked at the Bishop Museum and I would sometimes meet her after school, and I would walk through the storage areas to get to her office, and I would pass these beautiful examples. ... But then, when I came home to Kaua‘i in 1987, soon after, there was a wonderful woman named LaFrance Kapaka-Arboleda, who worked for Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and she was active in the reinterment of ancestral remains. You know, Senator Inouye and his wonderful Hawaiian assistant pushed through legislation that required ancestral remains to be returned to their place of origin, and Kaua‘i was the first place to receive ancestral remains from any university or museum across the country that received federal funds, was required to return ancestral remains to their place of origin.

So Kaua‘i was the first place to do that, and I was contacted to be a part of the team to return them to Nu‘alolo Kai in the cliffs. And that was in 1992, in August of 1992, shortly before Hurricane Iniki, and Edward Halealoha Ayau, I gave him great credit for this. He was a lawyer, I don't know if he's still practicing law, I think he's retired from law, but he worked for Senator Inouye, and was responsible for helping to push that (repatriation) legislation through. And he brought back the first ancestral remains to be returned to Kaua‘i, and I was so honored to be a part of the team to return them to the cliffs at Nu‘alolo Kai... And to this date, as far as we know, the kūpuna rest securely. So that was a very, very big impact on me and on our community, ... in the summertime, we have teams, various teams, that go in and cut the weeds and check on the birds. And we've removed all the cats, the wild cats, and we've reduced the rats in that area. And so the sea birds, the native birds, have returned in great numbers, and I fully support that project with the native birds scientists.”

After helping make kapa to repatriate the iwi, Sabra was approached by others who were curious about other uses for kapa. “And then from that, friends kept coming up and said, ‘You know, we really ought to make kapa for hula.’ And I said, ‘You're right.’ Because kapa should be living. Kapa should be made for people who are alive, not just those who have passed."

The wauke Sabra works with comes from old stock: “Because there was a fellow named David Boynton who was a botanist... And David hiked me down Kukui Trail, two and a half miles from the top road there in Kōkeʻe, all the way down to Waimea River. We went across the river up Koaiʻe Valley and he showed me an old village site. And at that old village site, right along the stream, their [poʻaʻaha] wauke is still growing. And so we harvested some young plants from there, and I brought them up. And that's what I have planted at my school, that's what I have planted in areas of the botanical garden. And so, we know it's from old stock, and I'm delighted to still have it growing.”

Relationships are central to her practice: “I also have a wonderful relationship with the State Forestry Division. I've taught some of their children how to make kapa. And when they have trees like ʻōhiʻa lehua that they have to cut, or that fall down, they have contacted me and asked me if I could use the wood for the kua, and for the hohoa, and iʻe kuku.”

Sabra explains her recent purpose and intent in making kapa: “Well, lately, it's been a lot of gifts, you know, and kīhei, and artwork. Because I haven't gotten any requests lately for kapa for iwi kūpuna, which is fine, and I have other people now who can make that. But I so enjoyed working with Leināʻala Pavao Jardin's hālau and having all of her ladies, and some of her gentlemen, make kapa for Merrie Monarch a couple of years ago. .. Well, having that whole hālau wearing kapa at Merrie Monarch was just a thrill, you know. And having people make kapa for kīhei, to use today, is another thrill. And having them use kapa to wrap iwi. Kapa that they made, that's what I want, is for them to make it. I will teach you, but I want you to put your mana into it.”

Sabra shares her desire to see kapa continue to be perpetuated into the future. “Oh, keep making it. Keep using it. Keep wearing it. Keep dancing in it. Keep celebrating it. Just keep it up, people. Keep teaching it.”

WESLEY SEN

Wes was born in 1956 in Kapālama, Oʻahu. He was raised in Moanalua since age 5. Where he currently lives is in a part of Moanalua called Waolani, which has a long and storied history, including once being an active place for kapa making. Around 1980, he went on a language tour in Samoa. “It was at that time that I met Mary Pritchard. And so, Mary Pritchard, I had asked, I said, ‘Oh, I would love to learn siapo.’ Because I met her here in Honolulu. Beatrice Krauss was her dear friend, she introduced me to her. So when I went down to Samoa, I asked Mary, I said, ‘Would it be possible if I can learn?’ And she said, ‘Sure, you just come over and I'll teach you.’ So for 10 years, she mentored me, taught me everything, everything that needed to be done with siapo.” Through his experiences in making Samoan siapo and Hawaiian kapa, and through his travels, Wes has become extremely well-versed in barkcloth throughout Oceania. He has a large repository of barkcloth from various places, which he often uses to educate others on their unique differences.

Wes explains that when he was learning siapo, kapa was still being largely self-taught by others who were experimenting. “... all of us were kind of trying to figure it out. Nobody could just say, ‘Here. Let me show you and do it.’ Not like today.” Yet there were also people who were instrumental in his childhood learning experience. “And Marie McDonald was our teacher, when we were children. I attended the Ala Moana Children's Center, and Marie McDonald was one of the instructors. And also, ʻĀina Keawe. ʻĀina Keawe was the director. Very, very helpful. Later on, when I started teaching tapa at Kamehameha Schools in... 1984? '83, '84?... she was my student! And she was so tickled, because she said, ‘Wesley is one of our kids that came to the program.’” The center focused on teaching students Hawaiian crafts, and this had a positive impact on Wes at an early age.

Wes makes his own kapa tools. Some of his tools were made with native hardwoods sourced from Puʻu Waʻawaʻa, with the help of rancher John

Keakealani and others.

Wes teaches occasional clases in spaces such as Ka Papa Loʻi o Kānewai. He grows wauke that he was gifted by Kilolani Mitchell, which was found from old stock above Mokulēʻia, and from wauke grown at Lapakahi on Hawaiʻi Island.

In terms of dyes, Wes often wild-gathers his materials. Of the main colors he uses: “Okay, I mainly use kukui. And kukui can give me black, or it can give me brown when I put the lepo ʻalaea. And the lepo ʻalaea I usually get from Kaua'i. I used to go get myself, when I went up in Kokeʻe. I went into the mountains and there would be certain veins of that in the side of the mountain. But today I have people, they know where to go and then they go get the ʻalae, because it's used for medicine as well.”

“I took students up with me, younger people, and then we gathered the [kukui] roots. When I started teaching at Hālau Kū Māna, back then, this is 11 years ago, I took the boys with me down the trail and we got the kukui roots.”

Wes had been especially interested in making functional kapa, such as attire for hula. Through experimentation with design, Wes has connected more deeply with ʻike Hawaiʻi and ʻōlelo noʻeau: “And that was a way to experiment with the ʻohe kāpala, because we had hundreds of ʻohe kāpala. How do you use them? Some, you can go side by side, some you can go single. ... by doing it, I started to find the moʻolelo. Because the hāʻukeʻuke has that little thing in between, that's made with the hala fruit. You get the hala fruit, you trim down to the bottom. And so that little thing, there, they dipped it in the dye, and then they went like that [gently tapping the table in demonstration]. Okay? And it looks like a net, and then inside the net, you got the hāʻukeʻuke. Okay, it says, ‘Pala ka hala, momona ka hāʻukeʻuke.’ So, when the hala is ripe and fall down, then we know you can go gather the hāʻukeʻuke, because the fat is ready.”

Regarding his intention as a kapa maker, Wes says, “I'm not an artist. I am still, just like Pua [Van Dorpe], we are trying to bring back what was, for educational purposes.”

MALIA & ROZ SOLOMON

Roz Solomon was born on September 9th, 1951, and is the daughter of the late, cherished kapa maker Malia Solomon, born November 24th, 1915. In 1950, Malia and her husband Herman moved to California, where they catered lūʻau for a decade. In 1960, Herman decided to bring the family back to Oʻahu. They were able to lease a fenced area at Ala Moana in the 60s, and it became Ulu Mau Village, an open-air cultural experience composed of skilled craftspeople. “I remember my mom once saying, ‘Well, if this is what we're going to do, I better go and learn about my people.’ So where better to start than at Bishop Museum? And then one day, she asked if there was somebody who she could talk to, and she was directed to Dr. Kenneth Emory. And that was the beginning of a very wonderful friendship, and he became her mentor. He encouraged her, and he was actually the one, according to what I remember her saying, that put her on the path to the rediscovery of Hawaiian kapa. So according to what he said, she asked him one day, ‘Is there an area that needs more research?’ And he said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘Hawaiian kapa.’”

Marie struggled to find a mentor. “So she thought, well, nobody here knows how to make kapa. I cannot find wauke. So let me go somewhere where they still make it. So she contacted Aggie Grey, and Aggie said, ‘Yes,

come. Come and stay at my hotel [in Samoa].'" Malia traveled there in 1961 and learned to make Samoan siapo through a relative of Aggie's, Fa'agoto Patu. She also brought back wauke from Samoa and planted it at Ulu Mau. To learn more about kapa, she devoured historic writings by scholars such as Samuel Kamakau. "So in actuality, I wouldn't refer to mom as a kapa practitioner. She was a kapa researcher, because she was trying to rediscover this art of how the Hawaiian women made this barkcloth. That was her focus, the rediscovery of this art." One day in April of 1967, she sent a sample of her experimental kapa to Dr. Emory. "He said, 'Malia, you little wonder. I could have sworn that this piece was ancient.'"

Roz spent many happy days at Ulu Mau, being a child of 8 when it opened. She learned how to pound poi, play Hawaiian games, and weave lauhala. "As a collective, all of the villagers, they all helped with whatever knowledge they could, that they had from their ancestors, and reading through the books, pictures, you know, and so forth."

Roz describes her mother as having a warm, inviting personality. "You know, she was such a gorgeous woman and she had this absolute warmth about her that, pretty much everyone that met her, they just loved her." She also shares that Malia was a detailed notetaker, and Roz has saved most of her notes, recordings, and other materials.

Malia had many hardships during her childhood, yet as Roz explained, her mother was able to overcome great adversity. "She was good with sayings, you know. And one of my favorite of hers is, 'You can do anything you put your mind to.' And I have lived by that through most of my life. I use that as a means of me telling myself, look, at least try. Maybe certain things, you won't be able to do it, but at least make the effort to give it a try. So I do that. And she instilled in me the power of positive thinking, so that has really helped me through a lot of the difficult times in my own life."

Roz one day met kapa maker Marie McDonald at a kapa show on Maui: "And she turned and she looked at me, and she goes, 'Your mama. Your mama taught me how to make kapa.' And she just went on about this. And I mean, the tears just welled up in my eyes. The way she spoke of my mom... It was so endearing."

"I am very proud to say that I am native Hawaiian. I'm Kanaka Maoli. That is something that I'm grateful to for my mom to have done all of this, and I was able to learn about this and be proud of my Hawaiian heritage."

VERNA TAKASHIMA

Verna was born on April 19th, 1947, in Ewa, Oʻahu. She lives in Kalāwahine and enjoys making kapa and doing community service work, now that she is retired. She first started learning kapa in 2005 under Kaʻiulani de Silva, after she and her brother, woodworker Solomon Apio, learned that they had ancestors who made kapa. "... in this book [Material Culture: The J.S. Emerson Collection of Hawaiian Artifacts] is a notation of my ancestors. It's Mamakahunaʻāina, J. W. Kahunaʻāina, her brother, Kamahiaʻai, and her nephew or grandson, I think he's Keoni Kaʻai. So this, it's big, he collected about 164 items of various tools, but mainly with Mamakahunaʻāina, who's my fifth generation grandmother, and her mother's and grandmother's kapa. So this book, what happened was we took... the Bishop Museum numbers of the kapa and their tools, and we were able to go to see Bishop Museum and look at the collections. But when my brother saw this, he told me, he said to me, 'Our tūtū made kapa, so you gotta make kapa.' He says, 'I'll make the tools, you make the kapa.' ... to be able to go to the museum, look at the collection, and look and see their kapa, and to touch it... it was... it was chicken skin... I felt so good. It was like, I mean it's hard to explain other than you get chicken skin. But it was like, I could connect to my grandmother, my ancestors, which of course, we never knew. But it was about 150 years prior. And she still comes to me."

Her brother Sol was integral to her kapa journey, as he made her tools, as well as making tools for many other kapa practitioners. He built a good relationship with community members and the Department of Forestry and Wildlife, which allowed him to source unique hardwood trees. Sol would use books like Arts and Crafts of Hawaiʻi to learn about historic tools to draw inspiration.

Verna notes that connections are vital for the kapa community. “So what we did was, we went and we gathered, and went to some people that we knew that had. So everybody kind of helped each other to make sure they all had enough to make them. And that's what happens, now. Even today, with my haumāna, if they don't have, somehow it... Maybe it's like my brother, when he said he needed a certain wood and the phone rings.”

Experimentation has been key in reviving kapa: “That's what we're all doing, you know? Because not much was written. And even with this book [Material Cultures], it tells you what kind of dye they used, but it doesn't... It says, ‘They used kukui,’ but they don't tell you, in what stage? Did you use the older kukui? Did you use the fresh kukui? You know, and all of that produces different. ... But for us, we have been, through the years, experimenting on our own.” This includes learning from and sharing with other kapa practiioners, as well. “So we gather, we have to gather from all different sources or resources, and people give me stuff or give us things that we share amongst each other, too.”

On her methods in designing finished kapa: “I've tried different things, different methods, placements, tried even more contemporary stuff recently, actually. But my kumu, Kaʻiulani, she really stressed tradition. Traditional. Same with Marie [McDonald]. If you're going to make the dyes, you do it traditionally.”

The social aspect of making kapa is something Verna values. “But you know what really would be good? And this is what I'm trying to do, and I think with some other kapa makers, our ancestors, they had a village. They had a kapa hale. So they had a hale, where the women would go in, and you had many women all beating, helping each other.”

Today, she teaches adult students to make kapa. Purposes and goals vary between kapa makers. For Verna: “When I went to look at my tūtū's kapa, and of course there's other kapa there, I said, ‘I want to make kapa as good as my ancestors did.’ Because it's very fine. It's like paper. Thin, and it was good, it was strong, it lasted... For me, making the kapa strong is my goal. To make it as good, as least as good as my kūpuna.”

DALANI TANAHY

Dalani was born in 1961 in San Diego, later coming home to Mākaha in 1985. She describes herself as a kapa practitioner, teacher, and artist. She first made kapa as a child in 1968: “And we had a section on the Pacific and made our bark cloth out of brown paper bags, as they often still do. I remember making it a distinctively, probably Samoan pattern, because I was familiar with that. ... But then my kapa making in earnest started in about, probably 1994. When Kawai Aona-Ueoka was doing workshops on toolmaking. And actually, when I moved to Hawai‘i in 1979, and I was going to school up at BYU Hawai‘i, my Hawaiian language class, we went to Bishop Museum. That was the first time I saw Hawaiian kapa.”

Much of Dalani’s experience making kapa has come through personal experimentation. “Oh my gosh, you know what, I tell you, having to learn on my own was hilarious, but it took me all over the place in here. I mean, I used to roll up the wauke and go take it down to the beach and put it in the tide pools and leave it. Or I'd tie it all to a juice jug, tie it out to the reef while I was surfing. I'd put a thing on it, I'd write a thing says, "Don't touch this, it's Dalani’s.”

Eventually, she started teaching classes at schools such as Nānākuli Elementary and Nānāikapono. “ ... when I do talk about who I learned from, I always have to put down the children. And actually, that's ongoing, you know, because you always learn. And then you see that, too, when you watch people do it with uncorrupted eyes.” She now largely teaches adult classes at various locations. An aspect of her teaching includes showing community how to make kapa for the repatiration of iwi kūpuna (ancestral remains). “So it works out and gives lots of nice exposure to people, and people are able to kind of give back to the ‘beyond community,’ the community that has left us.”

When Dalani receives commissions to make kapa, most people have a story or life event they want represented. “So then I have to create a specific story for that person, place, thing. That kapa is going to have this very specific thing, in this language that I don't know, but I reinterpret to match. So that's why I don't even really create new designs for ‘ohe kāpala, because there are so many. If you tried to replicate everything that [Peter] Buck collected, that'd be the rest of your natural life. And then it's always how you use it, and how you interpret it.”

Kapa can provide some folks, like Dalani, with income, yet this does not divorce the practice from its cultural roots. “There's a commercial side, yeah. There's the traditional side, yeah. You got to balance all of these sides out, so that it works for your real life, but so that it also works for how people perceive you as this cultural bearer.”

Dalani notes that getting into kapa can be daunting. “I have started thinking, why, what's really holding people back? Well, it's so many things. No place to grow trees, no place to pound. ... So even to do it as a side thing is still hard. Because you still just need so much resources and time, and motivation to do it. ... And so, how much kuleana are you prepared to accept as part of the trade off for being involved in this art? How much of your soul are you willing to put into that?”

Building pilina with plants is key. “I tell people, ‘If you want to do with dyes and stuff like that, then you need to first learn to see those plants.’ We pass plants all day long and we go, ‘Oh, that's pretty. Oh, that's nice. Oh, look at that.‘ But you know, when our kūpuna passed the plants, it was like, ’Here's the medicine, we'll get that later. This wauke looks good, we can make your malo now. This thing over here, the guys are going to cut those to redo the roof of the house.’ The plants had meanings, they had things you knew what they were for, you knew how old and when to use them.”

“... you want to grow your plants for tools; okay, that's a 20 year project. So you start that with the next child and plant a milo tree. By the time that kid is 40, you'll be able to cut something and make some of your tools with it. Otherwise, you're kind of growing it for the next three generations down.”

When Dalani has been referred to as a “master” kapa maker, her response is: “I'm a haumāna, I will always be a haumāna.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have to first give a huge mahalo to my kumu kapa, Roen Hufford, for being my mentor and friend these past nine years. I could never have known how dramatically kapa would impact my life - I am so humbled and blessed to be part of this community. To the kapa makers and kapa scholars, past and present, for your dedication to this remarkable practice. Being invited to listen to the voices of kapa makers and their family members, and to preserve their stories, is a kuleana that I am honored to undertake. The trust and lifelong reciprocity that this hana requires is not to be taken for granted. To Lynn, for encouraging me to go to grad school, where I first embarked on the journey of preserving stories through oral history. To my ʻohana - my mom Dawn, my partner Travis, and my brothers Jackson and Alex - for always believing in me. To Puʻuhonua Society, for funding this passion project through the Hoʻākea Source Grant. To my kapa hui - kapa Mondays will forever be my favorite therapy! To my many friends and loved ones along the way; mahalo for supporting me, and for humoring me when I want to blather all things kapa.

And finally, to the future kapa makers, the keiki who have yet to discover the joy and healing that is to be found through kuku kapa. May kapa, and all hana noʻeau, be sustained across generations in perpetuity.

ARTIST BIO

Avalon Paradea is a multidisciplinary creative raised and residing in Waikōloa, Kohala Hema. They refer to themself as an ʻāina-based artist, working with natural elements such as kapa, plant dyes, and earth pigments. Avalon views co-creation with ʻāina as a conscious, intentional form of reverence. Their meandering life path has taken them down the routes of environmental stewardship, oral history, cultural preservation, ethnobotany, and education. Through visual and written works, Avalon explores themes such as environmental justice, re-Indigenization, demilitarization, ancestral connections, queer identity, and disability. Above all, Avalon strives to use the ʻike they have been gifted and the skills they have acquired to encourage community members to strengthen their personal pilina with place. Resiliency and joy are to be found through collaboration with our human and more-than-human kaiāulu.

The portraits in this zine were created via cyanotype printing on kapa.

KAPA RESOURCES

BOOKS

Tapa in Polynesia (1972) by Simon Kooijman
Arts and Crafts of Hawai‘i (1957) by Peter H. Buck
The Works of the People of Old: Na Hana a ka Po‘e Kahiko (1976) by Samuel Kamakau
Hawaiian Antiquities (1898) by David Malo
Material Approaches to Polynesian Barkcloth (2020) edited by Frances Lennard and Andy Mills
Lā‘au Hawai‘i (1992) by Dr. Isabella Aiona Abbott
Plants in Hawaiian Culture (1993) by Beatrice Krauss

WEBSITES

Dalani Tanahy’s website: **kapawaii.com**
Kapa Kulture blog: **kapakulture.com**
Kapa Curious: **kapacurious.com**
For ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i terminology: **wehewehe.org**

For a more comprehensive list of resources including links to the interviews, educational materials, and a digital version of this zine, visit **avalonparadea.com/resources** (accessible through the QR code below).

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